

BEFORE THE
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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In the matter of

The Industry Proposal for
Rating Video Programming

To: The Commission

CS Docket No. 97-55

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Comments of National Institute on Media and the Family

Background on the National Institute on Media and the Family

1. The National Institute on Media and the Family is a non-profit organization incorporated in the state of Minnesota. It has been granted 501 (c) (3) status by the Internal Revenue Service. Its offices are located at 2450 Riverside Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55454.
2. Everyday new frontiers of our knowledge about children's brain development are discovered. The implication of the breakthroughs in neuroscience are both exciting and sobering. It is clearer than ever that the first six years of a child's early life are crucial in the formation of neural networks that will support a host of mental and emotional abilities. The fact that glucose metabolism in the brain peaks at the age of seven underscores the incredible amount of neural network development occurring during a child's early years.

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List A B C D E

3. The networks are formed by the countless experiences a child has. Each experience stimulates the building of connections between brain cells. The stronger and more repetitive the experiences are, the stronger the connections become. Consequently, the nature of those experiences serves as a major determinant of a child's brain "software."
4. This process is taking place in the midst of a tremendous revolution we call the "Information Age." Children today are being raised and educated in a very different way. Mass media have become powerful shapers of children's minds. The power of media to shape children's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, values and behavior is increasingly obvious to parents and well documented in scientific research. There is a growing body of evidence about media's influence on language development, reading skills, problem solving, attention span, and on attitudes toward violence, sexuality and responsibility.
5. The National Institute on Media and the Family's mission is to provide information about media's impact on the developing minds of children. Through research, education, and the dissemination of Children's Impact Statements TM a content based rating system the National Institute on Media and the Family is dedicated to maximizing the benefits of mass media while minimizing the harm.
6. The National Institute on Media and the Family is non partisan and non sectarian. We do not advocate censorship of any kind. We believe that, "Whoever tells the stories defines

the culture.” We are committed to partnering with parents, organizations, and corporations in using the power of the free market to create a healthier diet of stories so that we have healthier, less violent communities.

The Need for Ratings

7. We find ourselves at a crossroad in the field of technological communication in America. Almost seventy years ago, we developed a very powerful technology, television, which could help us educate, inform, and entertain all family members, and provide endless opportunity for learning.
8. Television today does provide some of that. Unfortunately, it also provides too many programs that have unacceptable levels of violence, sex, inappropriate language and other material harmful to children.
9. Children have been exposed to a steadily increasing diet of violence, sex and inappropriate language. This negative role modeling has contributed to major behavior problems in America’s youth, because the way children learn is to copy the behavior they see. The deterioration in the behavior of America’s children has raised a red flag with parents across the nation. Although the impact of television is but one of a number of causes of social problems, it is one that has generated more and more concern. There has been a

growing chorus of voices calling upon parents to make better media choices for children.

To achieve that goal parents need information about television shows.

10. As a result of this need, Congress passed the "Telecommunication Act of 1996." That act required the development of a television rating system. The system developed by the television industry was announced in December, 1996, is an age-based system, modeled after the 28-year-old movie rating system. It completely ignores the issue of content and merely dictates age appropriateness.
11. The reaction of parents across the nation has been swift and clear. They have rejected this "new" rating system as ineffective due to (1) a lack of information on the content of the shows, and (2) the lack of an independent assessment, since the producers rate their own products. Competitive pressures within the industry raise the probability of bias for marketing advantage.
12. The National Institute on Media and the Family has spent two years developing a scientifically-designed, content-based rating system called the Children's Impact Statements [™] (please see attached information regarding the Children's Impact Statements [™]) Evaluated by parents, for parents, this independent system provides parents with valid, reliable, user-friendly information on the content television shows. A national

survey of 600 parents indicated that 94% would use our system if it were available.

13. The Children's Impact Statements™ is one of several content-based rating systems now accessible for parents to examine. Parents, who are the intended consumers of rating systems, must be involved in deciding which system meets their needs most effectively. To accomplish this, the technology must be such that parents can access several alternative systems to help them in the decision-making.
14. The OKTV Foundation, Hyannis, MA. has been engaged in developing a content based rating system as well. Since we have found that we are engaged in similar work we have entered into active discussions with OKTV Foundation to combine our efforts to create an alternative rating system for parents.
15. The National Institute on Media and the Family has also signed the statement issued by The Center for Media Education, which calls for support of alternative, content-based rating systems. A content-based system is necessary to satisfy Congress' original intent, which was for a rating system that would empower parents to make informed choices for their children, based upon knowledge of specific content information on the amount of violence, sexual content and adult language in each program. The industry rating system is not acceptable, because it does not specifically identify content.

Recommendations

16. We support the position of the coalition of organizations led by the Center for Media Education calling for the inclusion of content ratings in the industry rating system..
17. In addition, we urge the Federal Communications Commission to encourage the development of alternative rating system so the scientific community and the market (ie. parents) have the opportunity for comparison. The principles of free market economy should determine which rating systems are available and which survive the test of time.
18. We ask the Federal Communications Commission to make certain that the “technological door” be kept open for the communication of alternative rating systems that the public may find more helpful.

Respectfully Submitted,

National Institute on Media and the Family

By _____

David Walsh, Ph.D. President

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON MEDIA AND THE FAMILY



Children's Impact Statementstm

Children's Impact Statements™

Background

Concern about television's impact on children is as old as the medium itself. The first congressional hearings on television violence were held in 1952. In recent decades, as program content has become more violent and accumulated research has documented the effects, the concern has grown.

Pressure for television ratings has also grown, in tandem with the concern about television's harmful effects. Professional and child advocacy groups have been lobbying for a television rating system for more than ten years. At the same time, there has been a growing dissatisfaction with the current movie rating system. In 1987, a Los Angeles Times poll found that 73% of parents wanted information about the content in movies, especially violence and sex.

The call for an improved movie rating system and for the establishment of a TV rating system led to the passage of the "V-Chip/TV Ratings" legislation, which was part of the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Children's Impact Statements™

Seeing the need for a more effective rating system, the National Institute on Media and the Family began the development of the Children's Impact Statements™ in early 1995.

David Walsh, Ph.D., and his associates at the National Institute on Media and the Family began the development of the rating system by gathering input from two sources: "experts" and parents. By reviewing the literature and by soliciting input from child development professionals, media critics, and mental health experts, a list of categories was developed. Concurrently, parental input about the desired categories of content information was gathered.

Fortunately, there was a great deal of agreement among the various groups. The categories identified across the groups included:

Violence

- How Much
- How Graphic
- How Portrayed

Sexual Content

- How Much Nudity
- How Explicit

Language

- How Vulgar
- How Sexually Explicit

Positive Character Traits

- How Respectful
- How Responsible
- How Caring

Once the categories were identified, work began on developing the evaluation protocols and tools to tap the categories or domains.

The Guiding Principles of Development

The criteria essential to create a good rating system were determined to be:

1. **Valid**: The system would need to demonstrate validity, i.e. it measured accurately what it was intended to measure.
2. **Reliable**: Inter-rater reliability would have to be measured and established.
3. **User-friendly**: A balance would have to be struck between providing sufficient detail while still keeping it easy for volunteer raters to use.
4. **Understandable**: The rating report would have to be easily and quickly understood by parents.
5. **Independent**: Because of the great potential for bias, the rating system would have greatest credibility if it were done by independent panels of raters.

After consultation with measurement professionals, it was decided that each panel would consist of five raters, one of whom would be a child development professional.

Development Process

Instrument items were drafted using a five point Likert scale. Drafts of the evaluation tool were then tested by focus groups. Items were deleted, changed, or reworked based upon focus group findings.

A similar process was used to develop the report form. Various graphic artists submitted different report formats. These options were field tested with parents and professionals. After multiple revisions, the most consistent positive feedback was given to the green, yellow, and red symbols, universally recognizable signals for proceed, caution, and stop.

This process of drafting, testing, and revising was repeated over a period of fifteen months. Once the rating tool and report form were receiving consistent approval, the process moved into the formal evaluation phase, which was designed to establish validity, reliability, and useability.

The Validation Process

The National Institute on Media and the Family contracted with a national independent research firm to conduct the national field research on the Children's Impact Statements™. Anderson, Niebuhr and Associates, Inc. completed a national study of 600 parents who were randomly selected and who represented all socioeconomic groups.

Present Status

Children's Impact Statements™ have been systematically designed over a two year period. Each revision has been based on field test results. The present version of the evaluation tool and the report form have been tested for reliability, validity, and useability.

It is the intention of the National Institute on Media and the Family to continue to improve and refine the Children's Impact Statements™. Changes will be based upon empirical testing and input from professional partnering organizations.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON MEDIA AND THE FAMILY

CHILDREN'S IMPACT STATEMENTS-EMPOWERING PARENTS TO MAKE BETTER CHOICES

The National Institute on Media and the Family is dedicated to providing parents with more and better information about media so they can make better choices. One of the ways The National Institute on Media and the Family does this is the publication of *Children's Impact Statements*.

Children's Impact Statements are criteria based evaluations of the television programs, movies, video games, and computer games that are marketed to children or children are most likely to see. What distinguishes *Children's Impact Statements* from other ratings?

BY PARENTS-FOR PARENTS--The development of the *Children's Impact Statements* took many months and went through many different steps. Input from the experts was combined with input from parents. In fact, hundreds of parents from all over the country and from all socio-economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds were active in shaping the final product.

INDEPENDENT--Just as Consumer's Union provides independent evaluations of consumer products, the National Institute on Media and the Family's *Children's Impact Statements* will provide a similar service about media products.

NUTRITIONAL LABELS FOR THE MIND--Media products are complex. It's impossible to get much information from one letter or number. *Children's Impact Statements*, like nutritional labels, will provide all the information parents want and need.

EASY TO UNDERSTAND--Great care has been taken to provide more information but in an easy to understand format. That way parents can get the overall picture in a matter of seconds.

COMMON SENSE--The National Institute on Media and the Family is committed to a common sense mainstream approach to media information. There is no mystery here either. The evaluation forms and the process used will be open for all to see.

For immediate release
October 15, 1996

SURVEY RESULTS ENDORSE NEW MEDIA EVALUATION SYSTEM

National Institute on Media and the Family's *Children's Impact Statements* Empower Parents to Take Charge of the Media

In September, 1996 the American Medical Association released results of a national survey that showed 75% of parents are disgusted with media violence, and that parents overwhelmingly want a more effective rating system for movies, television shows, computer games and music.

In a follow-up to that news, The National Institute on Media and the Family released results of a national study on their new evaluation methodology. Named "Children's Impact Statements," the new criteria-based evaluations are applied to movies, TV programs, videos, video games, Internet sites, advertisements, and other forms of media products.

Conducted by Anderson, Niebuhr & Associates, Inc., Minneapolis, the national study was completed with 600 parents during the summer of 1996. They were randomly selected from all over the country and representing all socioeconomic groups. Final results demonstrate that:

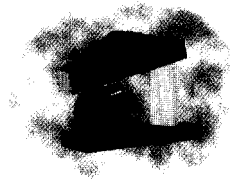
- 75% of parents are frustrated by the limited amount of information available about TV shows.
- 61% think the present movie rating system does NOT provide enough information for them to make good decisions.
- 89% would like to see detailed evaluations that would provide more information on violence, sexual content, and positive character traits.

When asked to evaluate the tool developed by the National Institute on Media and the Family, "Children's Impact Statements," the parents in the study reported that:

- 88% said that the “Children’s Impact Statements” are easy to understand.
- 81% found them more helpful than current movie ratings.
- 93% thought “Children’s Impact Statements” will be effective in raising the level of awareness about media products.
- 95% said they would be very likely or somewhat likely to use them if they were available.

“Last month, the AMA clearly demonstrated that parents have had it, and the public is ready for a change,” said David Walsh, Ph.D., founder of The National Institute on Media and the Family. “Today we announce that “Children’s Impact Statements’ are an effective resource to *empower parents to make that change*. Public opinion is obviously behind the new evaluation system.”

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON MEDIA AND THE FAMILY



Eight months pregnant, Jackie was already an experienced parent of two children, ages two and six years. She considered herself very aware of the impact that television and other media has on kids, and she carefully screened whatever her children watched.

One evening, she sat down to watch the six o'clock news. Her two-year-old was also in the room. After watching the news for a few minutes, the station broke away for a commercial. It was a promotion for a new movie starring Jean Claude Van Damme. The promo consisted of several violent scenes in which Van Damme was seen hitting and punching various people. Within a few seconds, Jackie's two-year-old walked over to her and punched her eight-month- pregnant abdomen.

Jackie was shocked and then angry. She was aware that children learn by observation and imitation. But she was unprepared for this real-life example of how quickly and easily toddlers can learn negative behavior. She immediately picked up her phone and called the network to complain about violent movie promotions running during hours when small children could be watching.

This true story motivated Jackie to get more involved. After becoming aware of the potential negative impact that violence in the media can have on the behavior of their children, parents often ask, "What can I do to change this situation?" We now have an answer!

The **National Institute on Media and the Family**, a national resource for information, research and education about the impact of the media on children and families, has created an evaluation tool to acquire this important information for parents. Now we need your help.

In order to move on to the next step of using our content-based rating system to provide this information, **we are in need of volunteers** in two categories:

1. Volunteer Team Leader

A. You would attend an initial one-hour training session, which is an evaluation session facilitated by a National Institute staff member. This process is so simple to conduct that you would need no further training to lead the sessions.

B. You would donate approximately one hour and thirty minutes for each evaluation session--about fifteen minutes to set up the session, one hour for the session itself, and fifteen minutes to return the evaluation information to the Institute.

2. Volunteer Evaluator

A. You would donate approximately one hour and fifteen minutes of your time for each evaluation session. You would view one of the following:

1. One sixty-minute or two thirty-minute television shows or
2. Four ten-minute segments of video or computer games

B. You would then fill out a separate evaluation form for each show or game (this takes about ten-to-fifteen minutes). That's it!

Each evaluation panel consists of five people who are parents, and must include at least one child development expert. Examples of an "expert" include teachers, therapists, licensed day care providers, social workers, physicians, etc.-- anyone with post-secondary training in child development.

When the National Institute receives the completed forms, the results are tabulated and incorporated into a **Children's Impact Statement™**, which is a one-page content and age-based rating of the product which was evaluated.


Since there are thousands of media products available to our children, the National Institute on Media and the Family is greatly in need of volunteers (parents and child development experts) to coordinate and participate in evaluation sessions.

As you can see, the process is simple, and takes only a short time. The Children's Impact Statement™ is the answer for parents and caregivers who want to actually **do something** to help provide more comprehensive information about the media products our kids are exposed to. With the support of your company or organization, and with the commitment from parents and child development experts on your staff, you can be part of the solution to the problem of media's negative impact on our children.

We would very much appreciate your time and your opinion as a concerned parent or caregiver in this very important project.

Thank you very much!

Sincerely,



Beth Zeilinger

Manager, Children's Impact Statement Department

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON MEDIA AND THE FAMILY



Dear Team Leader,

Thank you so much for taking the time to help America's children! Along with other parents and child development experts, you are helping to evaluate the quality of the television shows, movies, video games and other media products that our children are exposed to. The goal of the National Institute on Media and the Family is to provide better information on these products to consumers, so they can make well-informed decisions for their own families.

Due to the increasing amount of violence, sexual content and inappropriate language present in movies, television and games which our children see and use, parents and child development advocates across the nation are asking for a rating system that includes more detailed information on content, not just age-based recommendations.

After months of research and national surveys, the National Institute on Media and the Family has developed an evaluation system that results in a *Children's Impact Statement™*, which provides parents with specific content and age-based information on a variety of media products.

The evaluation session is very easy to facilitate. Each team leader gathers a group of five parents and/or child development experts and follows a simple process taught in a one hour team leader training session. General step-by-step instructions for the evaluation session are as follows:

1. Introduce the project to your panel. Include information about:
 - A. Why the evaluation system is important (ie. to provide parents with the content-based information they are asking for)
 - B. What is involved in the evaluation session (ie. view the video and fill out the evaluation sheet)
2. Distribute evaluation forms
3. View the videotape (ie. one movie, two half-hour TV shows, or up to four fifteen-minute video or computer games)
4. Describe and explain the evaluation form (Please explain that, in order to be completely objective, no discussion is allowed while filling out the form)
5. Allow time to fill out the form in silence (usually about fifteen minutes)
6. Collect forms
7. Thank participants
8. Return information to the National Institute on Media and the Family

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The National Institute on Media and the Family

When we receive the information, we tabulate the scores and the results are incorporated into a final *Children's Impact Statement™*, which is then made available as a guide for parents and caregivers. The National Institute on Media and the Family provides information only; we do not make a recommendation on any media product.

Thank you for your commitment of time and energy. If you should have any questions, concerns or comments, please feel free to contact me at 672-4775.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beth Zeilinger". The signature is fluid and elegant, with the first name "Beth" and last name "Zeilinger" clearly distinguishable.

Beth Zeilinger

Manager, Children's Impact Statement Department

**Children's Impact Statement
Evaluation Form**

Name of Evaluator _____

Name of Product _____

Type: ☐ **Movie** ☐ **Television Show** ☐ **Video Game**
 ☐ **Computer Game** ☐ **Music Recording**

Violence--actions or words intended to hurt someone or something. (Examples include but are not limited to biting, kicking, tripping, slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, and using weapons.)

1. How many instances of physical violence did this show contain?

1	2	3	4	5
None	Few	Some	Many	A great deal

If rating for this show was "1" on item #1, skip to number 7.

2. How graphic were the scenes depicting physical violence? In other words, were the acts actually and realistically portrayed or even exaggerated?

1	2	3	4	5
Implicit	Subtle	Explicit	Graphic	Exaggerated

3. How necessary were the depictions of violence for the story?

1	2	3	4	5
Very Necessary	Mostly Necessary	Somewhat Necessary	Mostly Unnecessary	Very Unnecessary

4. How realistic were the outcomes of the violence?

1	2	3	4	5
Realistic		Somewhat realistic		Unrealistic

5. Overall, how was violence portrayed?

1	2	3	4	5
Tragic	Negative		Trivialized	Glamorized

6. Overall, what was the attitude toward the use of physical violence?

1	2	3	4	5
Discouraged		Condoned		Encouraged

Language

7. How much vulgar language was used? (i.e. cursing, swearing, obscenities etc.)

1	2	3	4	5
None	Very little	Little	Some	A lot

8. How much sexually suggestive or sexually explicit language did this show contain?

1	2	3	4	5
None	Some mild references	Many mild references	Explicit sexual references	Crude sexual references

Sexual Content--the manner in which sexual behavior and/or attitudes were conveyed.

9. To what extent did this show portray revealing dress or nudity?

1	2	3	4	5
None	Some revealing attire	Partial nudity	Non-sexual full nudity	Provocative frontal nudity

10. Did this show contain scenes of seductive or sexually explicit behavior?

1	2	3	4	5
None	Passionate Kissing	Clothed sexual touching	Non-explicit sexual activity	Explicit sexual activity/sexual violence

11. If sexual topics were dealt with, were they necessary for the story?

Not applicable	1 Yes	5 No
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12. If sexual topics were dealt with, were they treated with respect?

Not applicable	1 Yes	5 No
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Core Values--the degree to which the show encouraged or discouraged behaviors associated with three core values: respect, responsibility, and caring.

13. Was respectful behavior encouraged or discouraged? (Respect is defined as recognizing the worth and value of another person or thing.)

1	2	3	4	5
Encouraged		Neither Encouraged or Discouraged		Discouraged

14. Was responsibility encouraged or discouraged? (Responsibility is defined as accountability for one's actions and/or fulfillment of one's duties.)

1	2	3	4	5
Encouraged		Neither Encouraged or Discouraged		Discouraged

15. Was caring encouraged or discouraged? (Caring is defined as feeling and showing concern and empathy for others.)

1	2	3	4	5
Encouraged		Neither Encouraged or Discouraged		Discouraged

16. Overall, how would you rate this program for each of the following age groups?

	Go	Caution	Stop
3-7 years	_____	_____	_____
8-12 years	_____	_____	_____
13-17 years	_____	_____	_____

In 1-3 sentences describe the *story line* in the movie, show or game you just evaluated:

Comments:

Children's Impact Statement™

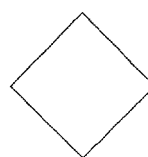
Product Martin's Splendid Adventure
Type Television Series
Industry Rating None
Synopsis:

Martin is a curious child who finds himself in a variety of fun and exciting situations.

The Evaluation:



PROCEED



CAUTION



STOP

Appropriateness

Ages 3-7

Ages 8-12

Ages 13-17

Violence

Amount

Graphic

Glamorized

Language

Vulgar

Sexually Explicit

Sexual Content

Nudity

Explicit

Character Traits

Respectful

Responsible

Caring

Summary: This fun and exciting film is funny and engaging for children in elementary school and older. Martin is at times irresponsible in his choices which causes some caution for younger children.

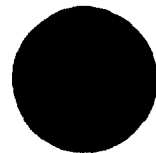
Children's Impact Statement™

Product Schoolyard Rovers
Type Movie
Industry Rating PG

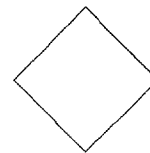
Synopsis:

The Rovers plot to take over a school and make the rules more fun for students.

The Evaluation:



PROCEED



CAUTION



STOP

Appropriateness

Ages 3-7

STOP

Ages 8-12

STOP

Ages 13-17



Violence

Amount

STOP

Graphic

STOP

Glamorized

STOP

Language

Vulgar



Sexually Explicit



Sexual Content

Nudity



Explicit



Character Traits

Respectful

STOP

Responsible



Caring

STOP

Summary: This film uses violence frequently to resolve conflicts. The violence is glamorized and justified which causes this show to be undesirable for children.